Philosophy as Change

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Abstract
In this paper it is argued that philosophy might benefit from a return to its episodic roots, i.e., to everyday individual problems, and that such a return needs an equally 'episodic' method, i.e., the discovery and design of ways of seeing. The argument is made in terms of an exploration of the potential relevance of Wittgenstein's views on aspect for such a switch.

Keywords
philosophical goals; philosophical methods; aspect seeing; Wittgenstein.

Philosophy Now

Philosophy is, of course, a many-splendored thing: different traditions, different questions, different methodologies, and, in line with that, different views on what philosophy is, or can be, or should be. Not that this variety is always visible: departments, journals, conferences tend to represent only part of this wide spectrum. But from a global perspective, philosophy is a far from homogeneous field.

That being said, current academic philosophy in the Western tradition is very much occupied with conceptual analysis, broadly conceived. In analytic philosophy, concepts have been the staple foodstuff on the philosopher's daily diet, with more recently pure conceptual analysis being extended to what is called 'conceptual engineering'. In current continental schools of thought, too, the emphasis is more and more on conceptual issues, and differences with analytic philosophy are manifested mainly in what concepts are deemed central.[2] It is the dominance of conceptual philosophy in the analytic tradition that forms the background of what follows.[3]

The central role of conceptual analysis is the outcome of a long process, in which philosophy's struggle with the rise of, first, the natural and, later, the social sciences has been a key factor. With more and more of the natural world, of social life, and of human culture brought under the aegis of the scientific method, what is there left for philosophy to be about?

This existential challenge has been met primarily by attempts to carve out a dedicated domain and to define a method to match. Thus, the story goes, science is about empirical phenomena, of whatever nature, and philosophy deals with concepts.

Science uses quantitative methods in search of law-like generalities, and philosophy applies conceptual analysis in search of clarity and connections.

This division of labour often comes with a particular view on how conceptual analysis and empirical investigation relate. The most ambitious stance is the one that gives the former pride of place: the philosopher prepares the ground for the empirical scientist. An outspoken representative of this view is Peter Hacker, as the following quote illustrates:

> So, what philosophy can contribute to neuroscience is conceptual clarification. Philosophy can point out when the bounds of sense are transgressed. It can make clear when the conceptual framework which informs a neuroscientist's research has been twisted or distorted. So, it can clarify what is awry with the thought that perception involves seeing or having images or that perception is the hypothesis formation of the brain. […] It can explain why mental images are not ethereal pictures and cannot be rotated in mental space. And so on. Far from being irrelevant to the goals of neuroscience, the conceptual clarifications of philosophical analysis are indispensable for their achievement.[4]

Often, the background of conceptual analysis is shaped by the assumption that a proper system of concepts corresponds to how things actually are. The basic challenge, of both philosophy and science, is, so to speak, to find the concepts that 'carve nature at its joints', i.e., to find the ones that correspond to the natural kinds that make up reality. That such a conceptual structure exists, is an assumption that has been challenged, especially with respect to concepts that go beyond the sphere of the purely physical. When social and cultural elements contribute to shaping our concepts, it is not at all obvious that there actually *is* such a thing as a 'nature with joints', i.e., a way that things actually are. Yet, some of philosophy and much of science proceeds on the basic naturalistic assumption that, ultimately, there is an objective nature to all phenomena and that this nature directs the way in which we need to investigate and explain them.[5]

One question that arises here concerns the expertise that is attributed to the philosopher. Note that reflection on, and analysis of, concepts used in science is part and parcel of the work of scientists as well, at least of the theoretically inclined among them. In view of that, one may ask what specific expertise philosophers have to bring to bear on such an endeavour. If the subject matter is shared, and reflection is a shared way of dealing with it, what specific, exclusive contribution can philosophers make? To ask that question is not to deny that a suitable division of labour might not be found that is profitable to both sides, but that does not answer the question in a principled manner. The question remains whether there any grounds for thinking that conceptual analysis is a distinctive characteristic that distinguishes philosophy from the sciences.

This question becomes even more urgent if we take into consideration recent developments in philosophy towards what is called 'conceptual engineering'.[6] The advocates of this approach are no longer satisfied with just analysing concepts, either as an autonomous philosophical endeavour or conceived as a 'first philosophy' à la Hacker. The time has come, they claim, that philosophy takes on the task of designing new and better concepts:

> Conceptual engineers aim to improve or to replace rather than to analyse; to create rather than to discover. While conceptual analysts are interested in the concepts we do have, conceptual engineers are interested in the concepts we ought to have. Their project is prescriptive rather than descriptive.[7]

An interesting question then arises: what determines what are good, new concepts? Such concepts will differ from the ones we have, by definition, but what would motivate us to adopt them? One answer stays, more or less, in line with conceptual analysis in so far as the determining factors are sought in the descriptive and explanatory adequacy of theories that employ the new concepts. Again, we may ask why conceptual engineering thus conceived would be the exclusive territory of philosophy. For sure, we are familiar with many conceptual changes that were induced by science and scientists, changes that have upset our ordinary concepts of space and time, of life and its origins, of agency and free will, and so on. And the question is what specific claims to expertise philosophers might have when it comes to developing new concepts that are adequate in this way. After all, when the changes are informed by empirical findings one might expect scientists to be in a much better position to do so.

But increased descriptive and explanatory adequacy might not be the only reason for engineering new concepts. There may also be political and moral reasons. Investigation of historical developments in political thought and in moral views reveals that many of them have been accompanied by conceptual change. Legitimacy, freedom, moral standing, responsibility, and so on, are concepts that have changed over time, and, at least in some cases, arguably for the better. Conceptual engineering can thus also be seen as a pro-active move to bring about changes that are deemed necessary. The question that arises here is analogous to the earlier one. It is clear that the concepts under consideration apply across the board, i.e., they are not exclusively philosophical in any sense of the word. But then we need to ask what specific expertise philosophers have when it comes to designing concepts that are better, in a normative sense, than the ones we have. Here, what philosophers apparently want to distinguish themselves from is not just scientists but basically everyone….

Finally, there is the issue of prescription as such, whether motivated empirically or normatively. Under what assumptions about how concepts function, how they are applied and expressed linguistically, does it make sense to 'prescribe' new concepts?

What are the requirements that need to be met to make this a viable move? These are tricky questions, as possible answers very much depend on one's take on how concepts function cognitively and non-cognitively, and on one's views on complex issues in semantics and pragmatics.[8]

We do not go further into the discussion of these issues here.[9] Rather, what we want to do in this paper is to explore a different perspective, a more modest conception of what philosophy could contribute to our intellectual and moral lives. It takes Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect seeing and aspect change as its starting point and tries to argue that the conglomerate of phenomena involved in that describe a space in which philosophy can be useful.

Wittgenstein, Aspect, Method

It took some time for commentators to appreciate the importance that aspect seeing has for Wittgenstein's overall philosophical outlook. The remarks on aspect seeing[10] may appear at first sight to be just about a particular feature of visual perception. Indeed, the kind of visual puzzles that Wittgenstein uses as illustrations may strike one as interesting in their own right but not of particular importance beyond the analysis of visual imagery. Thus, many standard commentaries on *Philosophical Investigations* do not pay that much attention to these passages, and in any case treat them as dealing with a topic on its own. However, there is a number of authors who have made a connection between Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect seeing and aspect change and his views on the nature of philosophy and its methodology.

An early example is provided by Debra Aidun (Aidun 1982). Aidun argues that there is an intrinsic connection between aspect change and Wittgensteinian philosophy, albeit mostly implicitly. Aidun states that 'there is no explicit textual evidence which would indicate that Wittgenstein conceived of philosophy as akin to aspect seeing', but notes that Section 129, a passage which is part of the 'discourse on method' of *Philosophical Investigations*, 'in which he is speaking of the character of those things which may be philosophically puzzling, certainly calls to mind the passages in Part II in which aspect-seeing is introduced.'[11] That passage runs as follows:

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.[12]

The way Wittgenstein describes aspect seeing, Aidun states, 'parallels this description remarkably'.[13] Quite generally, she notes that when Wittgenstein discusses aim and method of philosophy, he often uses a 'visual imagery': he talks about 'seeing', 'clarity',

and urges us: 'don't think, but look!'[14] Now the latter may not be particular to Wittgenstein, as the relation between seeing and knowing/truth seems built into the modern vocabulary in most Indo-European languages. However, it is certainly true that Wittgenstein's description of what philosophy, as he conceives it, is concerned with has a more than superficial resemblance to what happens in aspect seeing, in particular in aspect dawning and aspect change: the sudden realisation of another perspective that simply has been hidden for us thus far and the liberating effect that this may have.

An early book-length treatment of aspect seeing in Wittgenstein's later philosophy can be found in a book by Stephen Mulhall.[15] It gives a detailed analysis of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect, aspect dawning and aspect change, on aspect blindness, and on secondary meaning and meaning experience. It also explores connections with Wittgenstein's views on psychological concepts and the inner, and aesthetics. There is a connection of a methodological nature as well, but it is of a somewhat indirect nature. Mulhall mainly uses his exegesis of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect seeing as a way to characterise Wittgenstein's overall philosophical outlook, claiming that it:

> shows that Wittgenstein's investigation of aspect perception is designed to illuminate much more than a bizarre type of visual experience: in reality, it highlights what is distinctively *human* about human behaviour in relation to things in the world, what it is that distinguishes human practical activity from that of automata.[16]

Mulhall then uses that result to trace resemblances and differences with other philosophical views, notably those of Heidegger and Davidson. Thus, unlike other authors, Mulhall does not argue for a strong link between Wittgenstein's views on aspect seeing and his conception of philosophical methodology *per se*, but rather regards it as indicative of a broad philosophical outlook, one that Wittgenstein shares with others.[17]

Judith Genova treats aspect seeing in the context of Wittgenstein's aim in philosophy more generally, as 'changing of our ways of seeing'.[18] Thus, the methodological role of aspect seeing and aspect change becomes more foregrounded. Genova emphasises that this methodological role does not serve the purpose of formulating and defending philosophical theses. Rather, she reads Wittgenstein's remarks as demonstrating 'the relativity of ways of seeing'.[19]

An even more intimate connection between aspect seeing and methodology is constructed by Gabrielle Hiltmann, who provides a very careful, detailed treatment of the various remarks on aspect seeing.[20] And such a connection is also a central theme in what is perhaps the most influential work on this topic, Gordon Baker's *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*.[21] Throughout the papers collected in this posthumously published volume, Baker refers to aspect seeing and aspect change

when discussing Wittgenstein's views on the nature of philosophy, its aim, and its methodology. Often these connections remain implicit or are referred to only sideways. But the matter is also explicitly treated. In the chapter 'The Grammar of Aspects and Aspects of Grammar', for example, Baker explores the relationships between Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect seeing, on grammar, on 'conceptions', i.e., ways of seeing phenomena, and on methodology. Baker draws up a list of analogies and disanalogies between aspects and conceptions and connects them with the central role played by the notion of perspicuous presentation in Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology: 'Philosophical problems are traced to prejudices, and these are addressed by proposing other ways of seeing things.'[22]

This admittedly very brief and incomplete sketch of how Wittgenstein's views on aspect seeing have been interpreted[23] shows a variety of approaches, from more topical to more methodological. In the context of this paper, the methodological analyses are particularly relevant. But these, too, are heterogeneous. Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read make a useful distinction between what they call 'elucidatory' and 'therapeutic' approaches to aspect-seeing.[24] The first one regards aspect seeing, and concomitant notions such as that of perspicuous presentation, as a technique that can be used in the broader context of conceptual analysis. The latter is more radical: here aspect seeing is tied directly to what is claimed to be, if not the only, then certainly the most important function that Wittgenstein supposedly sees for philosophy, viz., that of clearing away the misunderstandings on which philosophy is based.

It is clear that the kind of conceptual analysis that is defended by authors such as Hacker embodies the elucidatory view. The clarification of conceptual structures as preparing the ground for proper scientific investigations is considered to be a positive and substantial function of philosophical analysis. Hutchinson and Read object:

> Such analysis or mapping or scientific-seeing of exactly how things are is the scientific ideal and is precisely not what the Wittgensteinian philosopher is after. It is surprising, unfortunate, and ironic that Hacker *et al.* fail to see this; their rendering of perspicuous presentation renders philosophy as (closely akin to) science.[25]

According to them, the therapeutic view is the right one, and they refer to Baker's work as a key example. That aspect seeing is an important tool in the therapeutic function that philosophy has according to Wittgenstein, is certainly correct. And there is room for that, or at least there should be, in anyone's conception of philosophy: there is always a lot of misunderstanding that needs to be cleared up. And aspect seeing, in particular forcing aspect change, is arguably a sound tool for bringing that about. However, restricting aspect seeing to just this methodological use is also limited, and too much conceptualised at a meta-level. For constructed in this way, philosophy-as-therapy is a second-order kind of activity: it is what we do (or are supposed to be doing) to get rid of first-order philosophy, by exposing it as based on

misunderstandings. However, we do well to note that Wittgenstein himself warned against this type of misconstruction of the therapeutic aspect of doing philosophy:

> One might think: if philosophy speaks of the use of the word 'philosophy', there must be a second-order philosophy. But that's not the way it is; it is, rather, like the case of orthography, which deals with the word 'orthography' among others without then being second-order.[26]

Rather than claiming the ability to observe and judge ground-level intellectual activities from a superior meta-position, we should be aware that all our thinking is interconnected: that what we think, and how we think it, and why, cannot be separated.

So, *pace* Hutchinson and Read, there seems to be room for a third, intermediate position on what aspect seeing is and how it functions. In what follows we want to work out what such a view might look like by focussing on two forces that seem to be at work: freedom and limitation, with the first being related to therapy, and the second to conceptual analysis. It is the interactions between the two that then define a third view.

Aspect and Freedom

Let us start with freedom. Seeing things differently can have a therapeutic effect in that it shows that what we take to be the obvious way, the only way, to see them in fact is not. That has a liberating effect, in that it loosens the strict hold that a particular view has on us, by showing that it is not the correct way of viewing how things actually are, but rather a perspective, i.e., one possible way of looking at things.

It is important not to view the ensuing change as the abandonment of the original particular view and its replacement by the new one. This would presuppose that there is, after all, a fact of the matter of what is the right way of viewing things. That is, of course, what is at stake in science, and in large parts of our everyday engagement with the world, but not in philosophy – at least not according to Wittgenstein. The 'replacement view' is committed to there being a right and wrong about philosophical conceptions. That is a view that fits traditional philosophy like a glove, and that is a sure indication that this is not what Wittgenstein is after.

Note also that the idea of philosophical views being wrong or incorrect is what informs the radically therapeutic view as well, as this seems to be committed to the idea that philosophy as such rests on mistaken views of how things are, and these must be exposed as such: philosophy is misleading because it suggests a wrong view on how things are. But then, if philosophy does not also provide alternatives, as the radical therapist insists it cannot do, the liberation that radical therapy is supposed to bring in fact drives us into the arms of science, and in that sense this view is scientistic, in much the same way as the traditional conceptual analysis view that it opposes.[27]

But that, we claim, is not what Wittgenstein is after, as the following illustrates. In the middle of expounding a long example about learning to read, which illustrates central elements of his rule-following considerations, Wittgenstein observes that a pupil's capacity to learn might stop at some point, and he then steps back to reflect on what the status of this observation is:

> What do I mean when I say 'the pupil's ability to learn may come to an end here'? Do I report this from my own experience? Of course not. (Even if I have had such experience.) Then what am I doing with that remark? After all, I'd like you to say: 'Yes, it's true, one could imagine that too, that might happen too!' But was I trying to draw someone's attention to the fact that he is able to imagine that? -- I wanted to put that picture before him, and his acceptance of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with this sequence of pictures. I have changed his way of looking at things. (Indian mathematicians: 'Look at this!')[28]

Some comments on this remarkable passage are in order. Wittgenstein emphasises that this kind of philosophical observation is not empirical: although what it observes can be an empirical fact, its purpose is different. He also notes that it is not about our ability to imagine things differently: that is a necessary condition for the argument work, but it is not its point. Then what is it? The crux of the matter seems contained in the claim that 'his acceptance of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently'. 'Regard differently': what does that mean? Is it a matter of regarding something 'not like this but like that'? Or is it rather: 'not *only* like this but *also* like that'? Where the radical therapist favours the former, it seems that what Wittgenstein is saying here supports the latter. When one teaches a pupil, one may indeed encounter both cases. There is the case where the pupil's capacity to learn stops. But there is also the case of the pupil that learns everything we can teach them and then goes on to learn more than we know, to do better than we can. The crux of the philosophical point is then to make us keep *both* possibilities in mind.

On this view, aspect seeing is productive: it creates alternatives that we can *also* use. Of course, there may also be a therapeutic effect. Seeing a different aspect of a given phenomenon removes the misconception that our original way of seeing it was the only possible one. That assumption of necessity (which is often the result of taking an essentialist meta-view) is what is dismissed as a misconception. But there is no need for us to also give up the original way as a *possible* way of seeing things. That is to say: what changes is not our way of seeing but our attitude towards it. Or, to put it differently, the change is an epistemological one, i.e., one that pertains to how we see things, it is not ontological, i.e., it is not somehow grounded in how things are.

On this conception, the ability of aspect seeing reflects our awareness of the intrinsic plurality of our engagement with the world, and aspect change is the execution of the inherent freedom that comes with that pluralism. Things can be seen

in different ways, and we are able to make use of that: we can switch aspects, make others see things from a different angle, and can be persuaded by others to do so.

What should be noted is that this is an ability that we put to use in a broad range of activities, so it would be wrong to regard it as specifically philosophical. We use it in everyday life, in literature, in the visual arts, even in science (as witnessed for example by the role of thought experiments in theoretical physics). The form it takes, of course, differs according to what we are concerned with. But at a general level the aim of these different implementations is very much the same: to make us see things differently, to urge us to weigh other possibilities than the ones we take for granted, to liberate us from the consequences of a 'one-sided diet' of examples.[29] That being said, it is a tool that finds particularly fruitful application in the domain of philosophy, shaped as it is by the quest for necessary, universal truths that go beyond the realm of the empirical. It is the very universality and necessity that philosophy strives for that is so much at odds with the plurality and contingency that is reality.

Thus, aspect seeing and aspect change are eminent tools for a philosophy that wants to acknowledge plurality and contingency: it liberates us from dominant ways of seeing that have established themselves as necessary, and provides a range of possible alternatives as an antidote. It liberates by making use of our creativity, our freedom to see.

Limitations and Meaning

However, the freedom to see, and thus to think, differently is not unlimited. Our imagination can produce an immense variety of visions and perspectives, but it is not limitless. A limitless imagination would not produce meaning, for meaning exists because it ranges over different situations that are nevertheless comparable in certain regards: we need both change and stability for there to be meaning.

Wittgenstein acknowledges the existence of limitations in several places, in *Philosophical Investigations* and, more extensively and explicitly, in *On Certainty*. There Wittgenstein observes that, for sure, there is a plurality of 'world pictures', as he calls the frameworks of certainties that form the constitutive basis of our practices.[30] The reality of that plurality is evident from the historical changes that these frameworks go through. But there is also a contemporaneous plurality of world pictures, adopted by different communities or subgroups within such communities. Especially for the latter the freedom generated by aspect change is important. All too often, plurality of world pictures leads to what is called 'deep disagreement', apparently insurmountable differences that seem to defy mutual understanding: meaning, it seems, fails to bridge such deep disagreements.[31] However, the plurality produced by our freedom to see, to imagine things differently, to discern new aspects, is limited. The constraints are two-fold: natural and socio-cultural.

The natural constraints come from the way the world is, including the way we humans are, i.e., our biological and basic psychological make-up. Of course, it is true that we can imagine properties of physical reality to be different. Not only science-fiction literature illustrates that, theoretical physics, too, is occupied with imagining different ways physical reality could be and investigating the consequences. However, for our everyday practices the way the world actually is, in many cases is a determining factor. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes the following observation:

> It is only in normal cases that the use of a word is clearly laid out in advance for us; we know, are in no doubt, what we have to say in this or that case. The more abnormal the case, the more doubtful it becomes what we are to say. And if things were quite different from what they actually are…our normal language-games would thereby lose their point.
>
> The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened that such lumps suddenly grew or shrank with no obvious cause.[32]

And what holds for lumps of cheese also holds for human beings: it is in virtue of a definite constancy in how we engage with the world, including ourselves and others, that we can have the practices that we have.

But there are also constraints that are not shared universally, those that define frameworks that characterise different communities or the same community at different points in time. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein gives various examples, ranging from the conviction that the earth is flat to the practice of trial by fire. Where such certainties are deeply entrenched in a community, the imagination of an alternative may be problematic, and for many even impossible. Within the community, the question of an alternative way of seeing things often simply does not occur. And in the confrontation with a community that does hold an alternative view, the danger of deep disagreement looms large.

So, certainties and the constraints that they satisfy have two aspects. Together they are what constitute meaning, in a broad sense. Within natural and socio-cultural constraints, communities adopt frameworks of certainties that constitute linguistic and non-linguistic practices; that define what makes sense to do, and how to talk about that. But socio-cultural constraints may fail to hold across communities, which means that constitutive power may get lost, with misunderstanding as a possible result.[33]

The fact that natural constraints are shared across communities may mitigate some of these effects, but this is subject to the condition that they are recognised as such, which is not always the case, and when it is, often only partially: it allows us to see what we share, but by itself that does not supply us with a handle on where and why we differ. Here, the ability to see and think differently is of crucial importance. And this is where philosophy as critical reflection has a role to play. It allows us to trace the constitutive elements of our world picture, both the natural as well as the community-specific ones, by reflecting on our practices, by coming to see the

aspectual nature of some of what constitutes those practices, by seeing and investigation new aspects, and by thus creating tentative alternatives.

As Wittgenstein emphasises with respect to doubt, not everything can be thus bracketed at the same time: we are never able to get completely outside our world picture and still see.[34] After all, what we see, what is meaningful, is so only because it is constituted by such a world picture. But we can investigate it, piece-meal, by tracing how certain elements operate, how they are connected, and by imagining other ways for them to do so.

Is this like conceptual analysis? Yes and no. There is objectivity to aspect seeing and aspect change where it relates to actual properties of things. A simple example: the famous duck–rabbit picture cannot be taken to be a duck–lion picture, no matter how hard we would try. But this goes to intersubjectivity, not necessarily to ontological objectivity. As was already noted, the way the world is does indeed put constraints on what we can see and think differently, but it also leaves room for a wide variety of ways of seeing. And that means that the assumption of objective concepts that 'carve nature at its joins' needs to be rejected. The effects of aspect seeing and aspect change, its importance or, in some cases, lack thereof, is in many cases much more a matter of socio-cultural and historical significance than of objective truth.

So where does that leave the philosopher in relation to the scientist? The investigation of world pictures is indeed an inquiry into something real, something empirical. That means that in terms of their subject matter the ruminations of the philosopher overlap with the work of the anthropologist, sociologist, or psychologist. However, the goal of their respective activities is utterly different. Unlike the empirical scientist, the philosopher is not after the discovery of general, law-like connections or underlying processes; his business is not that of explanation. The philosopher's engagement ultimately is normative. It is to open possibilities – not just for the sake of it, but to be practical. The guiding idea here is that for there to be meaning, actual or possible, there must be a practical point. This is key. In the end, philosophy is a matter of seeing *and* acting, of reflection and practical engagement. And the insistence on the latter introduces a moral perspective.

'Philosophie pauvre'

What view of philosophy emerges from this? How we act is intrinsically related to what matters to us, to our practical concerns. What we can imagine doing is one thing, what we can imagine to *actually* do quite another. So, the freedom that our ability to change our ways of seeing provides is limited in yet another way. Not only is it limited by what we are, and are not, able to imagine, but much more strictly it is also constrained by what we are, and are not, able to put into practice. And practice is shaped by what concerns us, what matters to us.[35] The freedom that aspect change

allows is made meaningful by its relationship with what makes a practical difference. And practical differences are strongly tied to what concerns us in our everyday lives. This is where philosophy-as-change turns from aspect change to practical change, from what is removed from the everyday to what is episodic.

It seems that what we are heading towards is what can be called a 'philosophie pauvre'. What could such a philosophy be? As we noted at the beginning of this paper the response to the ever-growing reach of science seems to be an indulgence in conceptual analysis, either quasi-scientific, as in much of contemporary analytic philosophy, or quasi-profound as in much post-modern philosophy (especially as used in other humanities disciplines than philosophy itself). But scientism is insincere and a mark of narrow mindedness, and these alternatives testify to an inability and unwillingness. What we need to take on board is twofold. On the one hand, we need to acknowledge that there is a lot that science cannot do yet, and also will not be able to do in the future. And on the other hand, we need to realise that the territory that science leaves uncharted can only be entered with modesty and in full realisation of the limitedness of human rationality.

If there is a place for philosophy, a role for it to play, with regard to that territory, it needs to be a 'philosophie pauvre': a modest, hesitating, critically self-reflecting philosophy – one that suggests, asks, observes; not a philosophy that makes claims, defends theses, projects visions. Rather than trying to carve out a highly specialised, exclusively philosophical domain, it seems it is both more modest and more productive to view philosophy as one way of dealing with the episodic, the everyday.[36]

Scientism is the extrapolation of optimism, or rather, of the combination of optimism with curiosity. There is nothing wrong with either, as long as it is being acknowledged that each has boundaries that are not their own. 'Transcending boundaries' is what can and should happen within the domain of science. But it does not apply to the limits of science. That is what scientism loses track of: the distinction between boundary and limit, the fundamental difference between the boundaries of what we currently know and understand, and the limits of understanding itself.

Let me illustrate this with a simple example. One area where what is at stake here becomes very clear is when we ponder the possible expansion of human life beyond our planet. The excitement that the very contemplation of that possibility creates (let alone the actual realisation of it) is deeply rooted in this optimism, in our longing for control and in our trust in our ability to gain that control. 'Determining one's own destiny', 'being the master of one's fate' – the ideal applies to the human species as much as it does to the human individual. The excitement is real, of course, and positive in the sense that it leads to remarkable achievements.

'Philosophie pauvre', however, questions that. It contrasts the optimistic projections about the future with simple observations about actuality: about the human condition, the constant failure of humans to live up to their ideals, to conquer

their weaknesses, their inability to make sense of their own lives. And about their never-failing urge to try to do so, to actually keep trying to do so. No rejection, but a change in perspective, a reminder not to forget another way of seeing mankind and its future.

Does the concept of 'philosophie pauvre' necessitate a withdrawal from academic philosophy? Not necessarily. Although it is certainly in line with its main tenets to disengage from the debates that form the core of current philosophy as an academic discipline, one might also argue that for it to have relevance beyond itself it needs to stay connected. Evidently, it cannot do so as another participant in these conversations, as its goals and methods are radically different. Yet there is a sense in which it does deal with questions that are also addressed in academic philosophy: differently phrased, perhaps, and certainly approached in a different manner, which means that its relevance must come about, if at all, in a different manner as well. This relevance consists not in providing alternative answers or different arguments. It rather takes on the form of widening one's horizon by providing another perspective.

For most people who have been trained in analytic academic philosophy and who have made a career pursuing its characteristic issues by its characteristic methods, 'philosophie pauvre' will presumably not be of much value. And the same probably holds for other approaches that make up philosophy today. However, there are people active in these traditions that do have cause to reflect on the nature of the research paradigm that they are engaged in, and to explore a different way of looking at what it is that one does. And, certainly at an early stage, when one is being introduced to the ways and means of a tradition, when one is absorbing the questions that are being asked, the answers that are being defended and challenged, and the type of arguments that are being used, at that formative point in one's training, one may feel a need for stepping back, and experience a change of perspective.

'Philosophie pauvre' is one way of looking at things differently. Not by challenging the dominant paradigm on its own terms, but by providing another perspective, by creating both space and awareness of limitations.

In Conclusion

Having emphasised the importance of becoming aware of constraints on our abilities to develop new ways of seeing, it seems only fair that we also look in the mirror, to investigate critically how we have been constraining ourselves, as philosophers. I think it is clear that the increasing academisation of philosophy has been both a boon and a burden. It has turned philosophy into a separate field, with a degree of autonomy that is probably higher than ever before. Philosophy is firmly established in academia: it has its own curricula to train new generations of experts; there are often highly specialised journals and societies that organise experts in subfields; there are schools of thought, with the hostilities and nepotism that accompany them; there are awards,

rankings, there is fierce competition for grants and other forms of recognition; and so on. In short, in all respects philosophy is a discipline like any other. Perhaps this is as it should be. But there are side effects that one may question.[37] One of those is an understanding of philosophy not just as an autonomous way of organising intellectual pursuits but as independent in an intellectual sense, in the same way as mathematics, or linguistics, or an-organic chemistry – i.e., as a field on inquiry with its own domain, its own questions, and its own ways of answering them.

Before it turned itself into a respectable academic discipline, philosophy was much more intertwined with the sciences, with the arts, with political and social developments. No doubt there is a lot of that still going on, even within the limitations of the current academic lifeworld: there is a keen interest in PPE curricula, there are programmes devoted to philosophy and natural sciences, and there is a lot of interdisciplinary work on the interfaces of philosophy with linguistics, social sciences, informatics. However, the constraints of the organisation of the academic lifeworld, the emphasis on publications, on specialisation, on rankings, external grant money, and so on, which are very much fostered by the way in which academic research is being funded – all that also has had a negative impact on philosophy's ability to engage in fruitful conversations with the world outside academia. It is in view of that, that this plea for a different type of philosophy is made.

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[2] Foucauldian archaeology and the concordant demise of classical phenomenology may serve as an example. An interesting example is Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 261, who identifies 'Idealism' as the culprit in the continental tradition:

> The dominance of Idealism over all university philosophy, from Hegel to the rise of existentialism and subsequently the vogue of structuralism, has done much to foster the idea that the only true philosophy must be theoretical and systematic.
> Such, it seems to me, are the historical factors that have led to the conception of philosophy as pure theory.

'Pure theory' in this tradition is, of course, not exactly the same as conceptual analysis in the analytic tradition, but there is a common core: a move away from the everyday, a philosophy that is modelled on the example of science, resulting in an intellectual endeavour that is struggling to maintain its identity confronted as it is with the ever-extending reach, and successes, of science.

[3] Thus, in what follows 'philosophy' is (more or less) 'current analytic philosophy', and for reasons of legibility we will refrain from making that restriction explicit.

[4] Peter M.S. Hacker, 'Talk for Neuroscientists', unpublished MS, 2004. Similar sentiments are voiced in Peter M.S. Hacker, 'The Conceptual Framework for the Investigation of Emotions', *International Review of Psychiatry*, 16, no. 3 (2004), 199–208, and in Max Bennett and Peter M.S. Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). Hacker is a curious case: on the one hand, he insists that philosophy has a role to play vis à vis science, while on the other hand he maintains that philosophy is about understanding. See, e.g., P.M.S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein and the

Autonomy of Humanistic Understanding, in Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey (eds.), *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2001). How can the two be reconciled? Only, it seems, if the kind of understanding that philosophy produces is taken to be intrinsically linked to the kind of knowledge that science delivers. That is the implicit form of scientism that seems to be at play in Hacker's views.

But why could not science autonomously produce knowledge that is really at odds with the kind of understanding that philosophy is after? There can be conflict, in fact there *is* such conflict: science tells us things about the world and about ourselves that simply do not fit in our human self-understanding. That is a fact that we need to learn to live with. And in some cases, though not in all, that process may involve changing our self-understanding to make it fit with what science teaches. But, in the same way that science is a dynamic process, so is the matter of 'balancing' science and self-understanding. There is no absolute right way, no stable configuration.

[5] For a discussion of how this assumption works in the domain of linguistics, and for an alternative conception of what a 'liberal naturalistic' approach in that domain might look like, See Martin Stokhof and Michiel van Lambalgen, 'What Cost Naturalism?', in Kata Balogh and Wiebke Petersen (eds.), *Bridging Formal and Conceptual Semantics: Selected papers of BRIDGE-14* (Düsseldorf: University of Düsseldorf Press, 2016), 89–117.

[6] One wonders to what extent this term reflects an underlying scientistic attitude, where theoretical and applied sciences serve as role models. Such a supposition is not purely speculative, given that conceptual engineering takes Carnap's method of explication as an important role model. And doing so it aligns itself with a tradition that is marked by scientistic ideas. For further discussion, See Georg Brun, 'Explication as a Method of Conceptual Re-engineering', *Erkenntnis*, 81 (2016), 1211–41.

[7] Jennifer Nado, 'Conceptual Engineering, Truth, and Efficacy', *Synthese*, 196 (2021), 1507–27.

[8] For a recent discussion of these aspects, See Herman Cappelen, *Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), in particular Part V.

[9] See Tamara Dobler, 'Pluralist Conceptual Engineering', ILLC, University of Amsterdam, 2021, for an in-depth discussion of the issues and a critical analysis of some of the basic assumptions of standard approaches in conceptual engineering, and for a Wittgensteinian, pluralistic alternative. Dutilh Novaes, 'Carnap Meets Foucault: Conceptual Engineering and Genealogical Investigations', *Inquiry* (2020), 10.1080/0020174X.2020.1860122, gives a historical perspective that links Carnapian explication, Foucauldian archaeology and conceptual engineering.

[10] In what used to be referred to as the 'second part of the *Philosophical Investigations*' but is now more accurately called *Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment*. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations – Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte, rev. 4th ed. by P. M. S. Hacker and J. Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[11] Debra Aidun, 'Wittgenstein, Philosophical Method and Aspect-Seeing', *Philosophical Investigations*, 5 (1982), 106–15, here 113.

[12] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 129.

[13] Aidun, 'Wittgenstein', 113.

[14] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 66.

[15] Stephan Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[16] Ibid., 14.

[17] Other work in this direction is, e.g., Jaakko Hintikka and Merril Hintikka, 'Ludwig Looks at the Necker Cube: The Problem of "Seeing As" as a Clue to Wittgenstein's Philosophy', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 38 (1985), 36–48; Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (London: Routledge, 1993). For a detailed critical analysis of Mulhall and Johnston, See Avner Baz, 'What's the Point of Seeing Aspects?', *Philosophical Investigations*, 23, no. 2 (2000), 97–121.

[18] Judith Genova, *Wittgenstein. A Way of Seeing* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[19] Ibid., 19.

[20] Gabrielle Hiltmann, *Aspekte Sehen: Bemerkungen zum methodischen Vorgehen in Wittgensteins Spätwerk* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1998).

[21] Gordon P. Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

[22] Ibid., 291.

[23] There are also authors who have investigated the relevance of Wittgensteinian aspect seeing for other topics, such as religious belief (John Churchill, 'Rat and Mole's Epiphany of Pan: Wittgenstein on Seeing Aspects and Religious Belief', *Philosophical Investigations*, 21, no. 2 (1998), 152–72; N.K. Verbin, 'Religious Beliefs and Aspect Seeing', *Religious Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2000), 1–23; J. Kellenberger, 'Seeing-As in Religion: Discovery and Community', *Religious Studies*, 38, no. 1 (2002), 101–8), education (Stefan Ramaekers and Paul Smeyers, 'Child Rearing: Passivity and Being Able To Go On: Wittgenstein on Shared Practices and Seeing Aspects', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40, no. 5 (2008), 638–51), or art

and aesthetics (L.B. Cebik, 'Seeing Aspects and Art: Tilghman and Wittgenstein', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 30, no. 4 (1992), 1–16; Michel Ter Hark, 'Experience of Meaning, Secondary Use and Aesthetics', *Philosophical Investigations*, 33, no. 2 (2010), 142–58). For an application of aspect seeing in actual art practice, See Tine Wilde, *Remodel[l]ing Reality: An Installation Package* (Amsterdam: Wilde Oceans Publications, 2008).

[24] Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read, 'Towards a Perspicuous Presentation of "Perspicuous Presentation"', *Philosophical Investigations*, 31, no. 2 (2008), 141–60.

[25] Ibid., 157. That seems to be a correct observation, but an argument can be made that the therapeutic approach in fact suffers from the same underlying mistake, viz., the identification of the meaningful with the sayable. For an argument to this effect, See Martin Stokhof, 'The Quest for Purity: Another Look at the "New Wittgenstein"', *Croatian Journal of Philosophy*, XI, no. 33 (2011), 275–94.

[26] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 121.

[27] See Stokhof, 'Quest for Purity', for more elaborate argumentation that both traditional readings of Wittgenstein's work as well as the resolute readings of the 'new Wittgensteinians' are committed to an identification of the meaningful with what is discursive, a view that arguably is exactly one that Wittgenstein rejects.

[28] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 144.

[29] Ibid., 593.

[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. G. E. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe(Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 93, 95.

[31] The term goes back to Robert J. Fogelin, 'The Logic of Deep Disagreements', *Informal Logic*, 7 (1985), 1–8. For an overview, See Christopher Ranalli, 'What Is Deep Disagreement?', *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*, 40, no. 5 (2018), 983–98. For the connection with Wittgensteinian certainty, See Duncan Pritchard, 'Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement', *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy*, 40, no. 5 (2018), 1117–25.

[32] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 142.

[33] Wittgenstein's famous example of the wood sellers, who sell firewood by the ground surface of a pile instead of by its volume, illustrates that there is freedom within the limitations set by reality. Practices that are different from ours may confuse us, but that does not mean they are not perfectly possible. As Wittgenstein puts it: 'So what is wrong with this? We might say, "This is how they do it."' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, ed. Cora Diamond (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 202; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, 3rd ed., eds. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees and G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), I, 59.

[34] 'If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.' Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 115.

[35] Wittgenstein emphasises this need for practices to 'have a point' in many places. A striking formulation comes from *On Certainty*, 474: 'This game proves its worth. That may be the cause of its being played, but it is not the ground.'

[36] This idea of a 'philosophy of the everyday' can be found in many authors, as, for example, the recent study of Husserl and Wittgenstein [full names, or at least for Husserl?] by Deva Waal shows. See Deva Waal, 'Everyday Philosophy: Husserlian Doxa, Wittgensteinian Certainty and a Shared Turn Towards the Everyday', Ph.D. thesis, KU Leuven, Humanities and Social Sciences Group, Institute of Philosophy, Leuven., 2021 In a follow-up to this paper I have tried to describe in more detail what this engagement with episodic problems might be. See Martin Stokhof, 'Episodic Problems', in Keith Stenning and Martin Stokhof (eds.), *Rules, Regularities, Randomness: Festschrift for Michiel van Lambalgen* (Amsterdam: ILLC, 2022).

[37] Jacques Bouveresse describes the danger of scientism for philosophy in striking terms:

> In a sense, there is no servitude more intolerable than that which constrains a man professionally to have an opinion in cases in which he may not necessarily have the least qualification. What is at issue here, from Wittgenstein's point of view, is not by any means the philosopher's 'wisdom' – that is, the stock of theoretical knowledge he has at his disposition – but the personal price he has had to pay for what he believes he is able to think and say. […] In the last analysis, a philosophy can be nothing other than the expression of an exemplary human experience.

Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein: La Rime et la Raison* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1973), 74 (quoted from Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) .